



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

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GAME BIRDS HAVE DIFFERENT NAMES IN VARIOUS SECTIONS OF COUNTRY

If you overhear two dignified gentlemen talking about zin-zins, hoot-amaganzys, and fitzys, don't think they are double-talkers or jitterbugs. According to W. L. McAtee, of the Fish and Wildlife Service, United States Department of the Interior, the said gentlemen are a couple of veteran wildfowlers who know their game language and are getting ready for the 1940 migratory-bird hunting season.

A zin-zin, Mr. McAtee explained, is the name given to the hooded merganser by many Louisiana hunters, while the same bird in Ohio is sometimes called the hoot-amaganzy. To the initiated, a fitzy is easily recognized as the American scoter while it lives in Massachusetts.

Other colloquial names include the smoker, for pintail, in Manitoba; ice-breaker, for mallard, in Illinois; hickory-quaker, for canvasback, in Maryland; and paddywhack, for ruddy duck, in North Carolina.

At least the jitterbugs have a national language; a hep cat in New York is a hep cat in Texas, and a gate can cut a rug in Wisconsin or South Carolina. The sporting fraternity is not so consistent. The ruddy duck alone has 92 different names in use throughout Canada and the United States, being known in Virginia as blatherskite; in Delaware, Virginia, and Arkansas, as bristletail; in South Carolina as leatherbreeches; and in Arkansas as bumble-bee-buzzer.

Many of the local names of migratory game birds, Mr. McAtee said, were applied by old-time professional hunters who knew their birds. "Many of these hunters were men of originality and force of character," he said, "and names invented by them had interest, charm, or humor--a tang of the boisterous out-of-doors in which they were conferred and a spirit and utter appropriateness that commends them to all men."

The old-time professional gunners were life-long frequenters of their familiar shooting grounds, so that bird names in use among them became strongly localized. A particular set of names in use on Currituck Sound differed considerably from one on Chesapeake Bay.

As the period of professional gunning approached its end and travel became more general, bird names were transferred more freely and new names were introduced by the more book-learned amateur sportsmen.

"Not only are there geographic and racial reasons for the many names in our local nomenclature," Mr. McAtee declared, "But our gunners seem to delight in inventing new names for the object of their sport." The golden plover has 14 names in Massachusetts, while the surf scoter has 16 in Maine.

Since 1909, Mr. McAtee has been compiling a list of the local names of all species of birds in the United States. His files, collected from hunters, authors, and other individuals, now include some 200,000 different names.

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